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General Assembly
Sixty-seventh session

Official Records

87th plenary meeting
Friday, 14 June 2013, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Jeremić ..... (Serbia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 4

Election of the President of the General Assembly

Election of the President of the General Assembly for the sixty-eighth session

The President: In accordance with rule 30 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, I now invite members of the Assembly to proceed to the election of the President of the General Assembly for the sixty-eighth session.

May I recall that, in accordance with paragraph 1 of the annex to General Assembly resolution 33/138, of 19 December 1978, the President of the General Assembly for the sixty-eighth session should be elected from among the Latin American and Caribbean States.

In that connection, I have been informed by the Chair of the Group of the Latin American and Caribbean States for the month of May 2013 that the Group has endorsed His Excellency Mr. John William Ashe for the presidency of the General Assembly for the sixty-eighth session.

Taking into account the provisions of paragraph 16 of General Assembly decision 34/401, I therefore declare His Excellency Mr. John William Ashe of Antigua and Barbuda elected by acclamation President of the General Assembly for the sixty-eighth session.

After the adjournment of this meeting, there will be an opportunity for Member States to extend their congratulations to His Excellency Mr. John William Ashe, President-elect for the sixty-eighth session, in the Delegates Lounge East in the North Lawn Building.

I would like to take this opportunity to extend my heartfelt congratulations to His Excellency Ambassador John Ashe, Permanent Representative of Antigua and Barbuda, upon his election as President for the sixty-eighth session as the sole candidate put forward by the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.

Ambassador Ashe brings to this position extensive multilateral experience, having represented his country before the United Nations for close to 25 years. He has held leadership positions in more than 40 committees and organizations, serving, for instance, as Chairman of the thirteenth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development. It is precisely that topic that represents one of the most important themes for the sixty-eighth session, during which critical debates on achieving the Millennium Development Goals will take place, as well as further discussion about how to conceive and set the stage for carrying out the post-2015 agenda. I am sure that Ambassador Ashe will make every effort to bring the deliberations of the various General Assembly work streams deriving from the concluding document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (resolution 66/288, annex) to their respective successful conclusions.

I have no doubt that he will lead the General Assembly in a truly able and dedicated manner. I wish him all the best in taking on the responsibilities of the

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Office with the utmost respect for the equal rights and dignity of each Member State.

During the months to come, as the President-elect and his team step up preparations to assume their duties, I pledge to work with him to ensure a smooth transition between our presidencies. To that end, I place myself and my staff at his disposal in order to lay the groundwork for an efficient start to the sixty-eighth session. Once again, I express my congratulations to him.

I now invite His Excellency Mr. John William Ashe, who has just been elected President of the General Assembly for the sixty-eighth session, to take the floor.

Mr. Ashe (Antigua and Barbuda): Today I stand before the General Assembly in the tradition of my sixty-seven distinguished predecessors, and I am deeply humbled and indeed honoured. I am also grateful for the trust and support that the Assembly has placed in me by electing me, by acclamation, President of the General Assembly at its sixty-eighth session.

The distance between my country's seat and this podium is merely thirty-six steps, yet the journey began many moons ago. Many other Members, in addition to my own Government, have graciously supported me, including my colleagues from the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States, the Caribbean Community and last, but not least, those from my own regional group, the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States. Without them, I would not be standing here. To each and every member of the General Assembly, I simply say "thank you". As I have done on so many occasions in the past, I will continue to count on each member's goodwill and willingness to work with me to find acceptable solutions in the year ahead.

Sixty-eight years ago, the Organization was founded in the wake of a terrible tragedy. Its Charter echoed a global longing for peace and cooperation. Since then, a steady stream of changes has reshaped our world, some positive, some negative, and some whose scope and magnitude are still evolving. I would posit that none among them has been more fundamental, more relentless and more far-reaching than the relationship between us, human beings, and the planet we inhabit. That reality affects each one of us.

A mere 18 months from now, the United Nations will launch its agenda for articulating the relationship between humankind and our physical environment. That agenda must be wholly universal. It must, in my view, be a development agenda that is relevant to all people and all societies, and it must bring about global transformation for everyone, with shared but differentiated responsibilities.

Implementing such an agenda will be a complex task — politically, socially, economically, environmentally, culturally and technically. Arguably, it may be the boldest and most ambitious project that the United Nations has ever had to accomplish, and we, the General Assembly, will need to be equally bold, ambitious and collaborative if we are to rise to the task we are about to undertake and ensure its completion. The undertaking is enormous, but we, the General Assembly, must find the courage to deliver on it. We have a shared commitment to work towards a collective goal and we are all accountable for our actions. We in the United Nations have been cautioned many times over that failure is not an option. But this time let us show the world that we are not resigned to failure and that we can be both bold and decisive in our actions.

As we consider our new agenda, let me highlight a few points. Above all, we must draw on the experiences — the lessons learned — from the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, both in terms of results achieved and opportunities missed. We must also reflect on the new and emerging development challenges, with attention to two main goals, namely, overcoming poverty and insecurity and ensuring sustainable development.

Both time-bound global goals and national-level targets with measurable indicators will need to be developed. New and revised partnerships and bold political leadership at all levels are paramount. We must skilfully integrate the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainability, and we must balance the practical with the aspirational. Finally, our commitment to a world of opportunity, equity, freedom, dignity and peace — the principles of the Millennium Declaration of 2000 (resolution 55/2) — should not just be reaffirmed; they must also be re-energized.

Our agenda, which is formally known as the post-2015 development Agenda, must represent a significant evolution in the thinking of the international community, and it must envision an interdependent, planetary community regardless of development levels. The time has come for the General Assembly — the

supreme, deliberative organ of the United Nations — to exercise its collective responsibility and begin as soon as possible the process of finalizing the one shared, sustainable development agenda. To say it more clearly, development in general, and sustainable development in particular, is the work of the General Assembly. Very simply put, it is our reason for being.

During the upcoming sixty-eighth session, many of the outcomes of the Rio de Janeiro United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, as we just heard from the President, are expected to come to fruition. We are expected to provide the requisite leadership and clarity for the process. I sincerely believe we have a duty to deliver on our responsibilities in an open, inclusive and transparent manner.

I therefore declare the theme of the sixty-eighth session, as well as that of the annual general debate of the General Assembly, to be "The post-2015 development agenda: setting the stage". We all know that simply identifying a theme is largely symbolic and not an end in itself. Having done so, however, we must now take the next crucial, perhaps even arduous, steps to tease out the theme, enhance its relevance, create engagement opportunities for Member States, transform challenges into opportunities and strengthen our collective unity of purpose and commitment. Let us forge ahead with dogged determination and be steadfast. The theme is not a mere slogan. It should be operationalized and lead to concrete action for the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda.

With that in mind, I will convene a number of related events towards fulfilling that objective. Working closely with the Secretary-General and his team and the relevant United Nations funds, programmes and offices, including, but not limited to, the United Nations Population Fund, UNICEF, the United Nations Development Programme, UN-Women, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the recently established Office for South-South Cooperation, my team and I will host high-level events on the following three topics: the contributions of women, the young and civil society to the post-2015 development agenda; human rights and the rule of law in the post-2015 development agenda; and the contributions of South-South and triangular cooperation and information and communication technologies for development to the post-2015 development agenda.

In addition to those high-level events, my team and I will work closely with Member States to convene three thematic debates. Each debate will be geared towards the further elaboration of the chosen theme. We will seek to provide results-oriented outcomes on the following issues: the role of partnerships; ensuring stable and peaceful societies; and water, sanitation and sustainable energy in the post-2015 development agenda.

In the course of the long lead-up to today, I have been deeply touched by all the advice from colleagues about what to highlight during the sixty-eighth session — also known as lobbying. To no one's surprise, in an Assembly as diverse as ours, ideas often differ. Nonetheless, I have identified the following common elements: the need for an open, transparent and collaborative presidency; greater involvement by the established organs of the General Assembly; and reinvigoration of the reform agenda of the General Assembly.

First, in response to the almost univeral call for an open, transparent and collaborative presidency, let me provide a very clear answer: yes. My team and I pledge to be open and fully transparent, and we welcome the Assembly's input for the work of the sixty-eighth session. However, let me be equally clear on another point. Whenever and wherever true leadership is required, whenever deadlocks must be broken and processes advanced, I will do my utmost to be resolute, fair, even-handed and unequivocal. On that the General Assembly has my personal assurance.

Secondly, beyond any shadow of a doubt, there is a need for greater involvement by the various organs of our institution in its work. Therefore, to ensure increased cooperation, coordination and exchange of information, it is my intention to hold regular meetings with the Secretary-General and senior members of his team and to continue the practice of holding periodic informal briefings, during which he briefs us on his priorities, travels and most recent activities, including his participation in international meetings and events organized outside the United Nations. In my meetings with the Presidents of Security Council and the Economic and Social Council, as well as the Chairs of subsidiary bodies, I will introduce periodic informal briefings by each to update the General Assembly on the work of those principal organs. Last but not least, I will also hold regular meetings with the General Committee. That will enable the Committee to assess

the ongoing progress in the work of the sixty-eighth session so that we may receive its counsel on how best to further our work. To that end, my team and I will work closely with the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management and his team to ensure a smooth and productive sixty-eighth session.

Thirdly, with regard to reinvigorating the reform of the General Assembly, let me say that our relevance as an institution depends upon it. Any organization that cannot evolve or adapt to changing circumstances is at risk — any organization. Our time at the United Nations is a privileged time. The hopes and dreams of millions for a conflict-free world rest on us. We cannot afford to be indifferent or immune to the changing world around us. We cannot stand idly by as millions struggle, or merely settle for surviving, when there should be opportunities for all to thrive. Put another way, the United Nations must reform or it will become inconsequential.

A critical component of that reform is to revitalize the General Assembly and its work programme. What exactly does that mean? It means enhancing its role and authority and increasing its effectiveness and efficiency. Of course reform is needed in all the principal organs of the United Nations, including the Economic and Social Council and the Security Council. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that I will strive to reinvigorate, advance and, yes, against incredible — and some would say impossible odds — conclude discussions on the reform of these organs. That is a top priority, and I call on each and every one of in the General Assembly to join me in making it a reality.

Finally, we must also be cognizant of the evolving challenges the use cyberspace poses. To that end, I intend to work with Member States on identifying ways in which the Assembly can, and should, address emerging cyberissues.

As the Assembly may know, I was born on a small island in the Caribbean. However, I take to heart the often-repeated maxim that no man is an island. I fully recognize that, given the task of my position, I will need to rely — indeed depend — on all members if I am to perform my duties effectively. As a start, I have assembled a team of highly capable, experienced professionals, most of whom are drawn from among the General Assembly's midst and represent the rich diversity that is our United Nations. This is only the beginning. But what I really need is for each and every Member State and individual to play a role in making the sixty-eighth session of the General Assembly productive and results-oriented, since in reality we are all on the same team. I therefore welcome everyone on board.

The President: I thank His Excellency Mr. John William Ashe, President-elect for the sixty-eighth session of the General Assembly.

I now give the floor to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

The Secretary-General: I am very happy to be here today. I extend my warmest congratulations to Ambassador John W. Ashe on his election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-eighth session. We have worked together on a number of important issues over the years. He shares my passion for sustainable development and my concern about the problem of climate change. He demonstrated his commitment by serving on the governing bodies of major United Nations environmental agreements. I am especially grateful for his service as co-Chair of the Bureau of the preparatory process for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), held one year ago.

Ambassador Ashe also gained valuable experience as Chair of the Fifth Committee. That is one of the toughest jobs at the United Nations, and it prepares one to work long hours. As Chair of the Group of 77 in New York, Ambassador Ashe led an influential and diverse coalition of States. Representing Antigua and Barbuda, he can help the Assembly make an important contribution to the 2014 International Conference on Small Island Developing States.

Ambassador Ashe has more than impressive experience and educational credentials. Above all, our new General Assembly President is a trusted partner with personal integrity. That is essential in the world of diplomacy, where one's word is the most valuable currency. He has a very strong presence; some even call it a force field. We see that most clearly when diplomats gravitate toward Ambassador Ashe to seek consensus. He is known as the go-to person when discussions break down. That happened in 2002 when he led negotiations on contentious issues at the World Summit for Social Development, and, more recently, when he co-chaired the Rio+20 negotiations.

Ambassador Ashe has a quiet confidence. His approach is gentle but direct. It works. He is always ready to engage with colleagues for the greater goals of helping the United Nations to transform our world. He will preside over an important session, when we push to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and begin shaping our global vision for the post-2015 future.

As the Assembly may know, I served as Chef de Cabinet for the President of the General Assembly in 2001 and 2002, and my Deputy Secretary-General, Mr. Jan Eliasson, was himself an Assembly President. Our administration fully appreciates the value of the General Assembly. We are absolutely committed to supporting the Assembly.

I thank President Jeremić for presiding over such a dynamic and constructive session. I look forward to working with President-elect Ashe to realize our common goals. Let us make the most of our partnership in the year to come.

The President: I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

I now give the floor to the representative of Djibouti, who will speak on behalf of the Group of African States.

Mr. Olhaye (Djibouti): I have the honour to address the General Assembly on behalf of the Group of African States to warmly congratulate His Excellency Mr. John Ashe, Permanent Representative of Antigua and Barbuda, on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-eighth session, as well as to wish him every success in fulfilling his mandate. His vast and long experience at the United Nations and the immense goodwill he enjoys among his colleagues are real advantages that will certainly enhance his ability to advance the major projects of the sixty-eighth session. The President-elect has already made significant contributions. I am sure that his steady stewardship will steer our deliberations towards success.

The Group of African States would also like to recognize your commendable leadership and notable work, Mr. President, which guided the work of the Assembly over the past year. You have served the collective good of the General Assembly by helping to re-energize it in carrying out its functions and to ensure the Assembly's continued prominence in the work of the United Nations.

There is a great deal of work ahead of us. The international community is dealing with major challenges that entail significant stakes for States. Those challenges in particular affect the continent of Africa. Africa needs special attention from the United Nations to aid it in its efforts to promote sustained economic growth and sustainable development and to combat insecurity. At a time when the role of the United Nations is hastened by an ever-increasing multidimensionalism and multilateralism in international affairs, let us continue our focus on the promotion of peace and security and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, while formulating the Sustainable Development Goals and shaping the post-2015 development agenda — the fight against climate change, ensuring respect for human rights, democracy and the empowerment of women.

In conclusion, on behalf of the African States, I would like once again to commit our full support to His Excellency Mr. John Ashe during his presidency.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Sri Lanka, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Asia-Pacific States.

Mr. Silva (Sri Lanka): On behalf of the States members of the Group of Asia-Pacific States, it is an honour to congratulate His Excellency Ambassador John Ashe, Permanent Representative of Antigua and Barbuda, on his election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-eighth session. Ambassador Ashe is poised to take over the helm of the General Assembly at a time when the wide-ranging responsibilities and tasks of this principal organ are set to undergo further expansion. We are confident that the long and distinguished foreign service career of Ambassador Ashe will serve him in good stead in his new role.

Ambassador Ashe has assumed a leadership role in a wide range of United Nations bodies related to the fields of sustainable development, South-South cooperation, the environment, administration and budgetary matters, among others. He currently serves as President of the High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation. Some of his past leadership roles include serving as Chair of the Commission on Sustainable Development at its thirteenth session, Chair of the New York chapter of the Group of 77 and China and Chair of the Fifth Committee. He also serves on the governing boards of major United Nations funds and programmes.

The incoming President takes over from His Excellency Mr. Vuk Jeremić, who has very ably led the General Assembly during the past year. On behalf of the Asia-Pacific Group, we would like to thank President Jeremić for undertaking a very ambitious task load during his presidency. During his tenure, we witnessed the increased involvement of the General Assembly in a variety of important global issues. We hope that the Office of the President of the General Assembly will be able to effectively complete the agenda of the sixty-seventh session in the remaining months under the leadership of President Jeremić. Currently, his Office is in the process of preparing for four high-level meetings, to be organized during the sixty-eighth session — on disability and development, the Millennium Development Goals, nuclear disarmament and international migration and development. The Asia-Pacific Group extends its warm wishes to President Jeremić for continued success in his future career.

We have a very complex, but optimistic, agenda ahead in the United Nations system. We are in a transition period of United Nations reforms, when many intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder processes aimed at the post-2015 period pose many opportunities as well as challenges. We hope that Ambassador Ashe and his Office will be provided with the human, financial and other resources to successfully cope with the increasing responsibilities of the General Assembly related to the post-2015 development agenda. The smooth implementation of the incoming President's workload will be facilitated by close cooperation among the Office of the President and the Main Committees of the General Assembly. During the transition period of the incoming President, the resources of the Secretariat should be fully utilized to ensure continuity and strengthen the institutional capacity of the presidency of the General Assembly. We also hope that the Office of the President will continue its close cooperation with Member States.

The Asia-Pacific Group hopes that Ambassador Ashe will effectively use this body to strengthen global peace, security and sustainability.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Trinidad and Tobago, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.

Mr. Charles (Trinidad and Tobago) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Group of Latin American and Caribbean States (GRULAC) considers it a great honour to convey our congratulations to one of our members, Mr. John Ashe, Permanent Representative of Antigua and Barbuda to the United Nations, on his election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-eighth session.

Today, Ambassador Ashe is entering a new era of his outstanding diplomatic career. GRULAC recognizes him as a true custodian of the founding principles of the Charter of the United Nations. Ambassador Ashe is a multilateralist at heart, with vast experience as chief negotiator and chair of many meetings of the World Trade Organization and the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development.

Ambassador Ashe has also served on the executive boards of the primary programmes, agencies and funds of the United Nations, including environmental agencies, and was Chair of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions. He has also presided over ambassador-level meetings of the Group of 77 and China in New York, and has been recognized as a member of the Order of Saint Michael and Saint George by Queen Elizabeth II in recognition of his diplomatic service at the global level. Currently, Ambassador Ashe is presiding over the High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation.

The world continues to face various global threats as a result of civil wars, climate change, poverty, economic crises and health-care issues, among others. The United Nations must continue to adapt itself to address these global challenges. In that regard, GRULAC is certain that as the leadership of the General Assembly passes from the competent hands of its current President, Mr. Vuk Jeremić, to Mr. John Ashe, the General Assembly will continue to enjoy solid and reliable leadership.

(*spoke in English*)

GRULAC takes this opportunity to highlight the successful presidency of Mr. Vuk Jeremić, President of the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session, and most notably his fruitful visit to the region in March and his consultative approach among the various regions with regard to the placement of pertinent items on the agenda of the General Assembly.

The Group recognizes the veritable strides made in advancing the United Nations agenda under the stewardship of Mr. Vuk Jeremić. As he prepares

to leave the Office of the President of the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session, we are confident that his extensive political and diplomatic service will continue to engage the attention of the international community. In so doing, GRULAC wishes Mr. Jeremić every success in his future engagements.

In conclusion, GRULAC submits that the roles of the President of the General Assembly and its membership are mutually dependent and must be governed by the principles of mutual trust, respect and cooperation. Moving forward, GRULAC expresses significant confidence in the guidance of Ambassador John Ashe to steer this body along a path that will adequately address ongoing global challenges through constructive and meaningful dialogue.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Ireland, who will speak on behalf of the Western European and other States.

Ms. Anderson (Ireland): On behalf of the Group of Western European and other States, I have the honour to extend our warm congratulations to Mr. John Ashe of Antigua and Barbuda on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-eighth session. Ambassador Ashe is both a very familiar and very highly respected figure here at the United Nations. His diplomatic expertise across a range of issues is extensive.

During his tenure as Permanent Representative of Antigua and Barbuda to the United Nations, he has presided over the Executive Boards of both UNICEF and the United Nations Development Programme/United Nations Population Fund, chaired the Fifth Committee and co-chaired the preparatory process for the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development. His tireless commitment to the sustainable development and climate change agenda is well known.

Those are but a few of the credentials justifying his election to the presidency of the General Assembly. We are certain that Ambassador Ashe's accomplished background and personal dynamism will contribute enormously to the work of the General Assembly during the sixty-eighth session.

I also take the opportunity to extend our appreciation to the outgoing President, Mr. Vuk Jeremić, for his role at the helm of the General Assembly and his work to advance the objectives of this session.

On behalf of the group of Western European and other States, I would like to pledge our full support to the President-elect during his tenure and wish him every success in carrying out his duties during the sixty-eighth session of the General Assembly.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Hungary.

Mr. Kőrösi (Hungary): I am speaking as an Ambassador from Central and Eastern Europe and as one of the chairs of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals and the intergovernmental process. You, Sir, and President-elect Ambassador John Ashe referred to that in your statements.

My delegation wishes to express its warmest congratulations to President-elect Ambassador John Ashe, and to reassure him that we very much look forward to working with him on realizing the strategic endeavours he so clearly indicated as a top priority for him and for the Assembly.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the United States of America, who will speak on behalf of the host country.

Ms. Rice (United States of America): On behalf of the United States, the host country of the United Nations, I have the honour of warmly welcoming the election of Mr. John Ashe of Antigua and Barbuda as the President of the General Assembly at its sixty-eighth session. My Government appreciates that Ambassador Ashe is willing to take on this role. He is richly qualified for that leadership position, given his vast experience in multilateral diplomacy, including his service with distinction as Antigua and Barbuda's Permanent Representative to the United Nations and its Ambassador to the World Trade Organization.

A true veteran of United Nations legislative process, Ambassador Ashe has ably presided over executive boards of the United Nations funds and programmes for development, the Fifth Committee and the Commission on Sustainable Development, and just one year ago guided the membership through the preparations for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development. We welcome his statement of priorities for the next session, including the Assembly's vital work on sustainable development.

The sixty-eighth session of the General Assembly will be especially consequential for the United Nations, and we could not be in better hands. The United States

looks forward to working with President-elect Ashe and wishes him every success in carrying out his duties during the sixty-eighth session of the General Assembly.

The United States also wishes to express its thanks to Mr. Vuk Jeremić for his dedicated service as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session.

The President: The Assembly has thus concluded its consideration of agenda item 4.

Drawing of lots for the seating protocol for the sixty-eighth regular session

The President: As announced in the *Journal of the United Nations*, we will now proceed to the drawing of lots to determine the Member State that will occupy the first seat in the General Assembly Hall at the sixty-eighth session. In accordance with the established practice, the Secretary-General draws the name of one Member State from a box containing the names of the States members of the General Assembly. The delegation whose name is drawn will occupy the first seat in the General Assembly Hall, and the other countries will follow in English alphabetical order. The same order will be observed in the Main Committees.

I now invite the Secretary-General to proceed with the drawing of lots.

Having been drawn by lot by the Secretary-General, Croatia was chosen to occupy the first seat in the General Assembly Hall at the sixty-eighth session.

The President: I thank the Secretary-General for drawing the lots.

I wish to inform members that, immediately following the adjournment of this meeting, the Assembly will hold the 88th plenary meeting to elect the 21 Vice-Presidents of the General Assembly for the sixty-eighth session.

The meeting rose at 11.05 a.m.